UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.274
17 February 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Fourteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 274th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 26 January 1995, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Third and fourth periodic reports of the Russian Federation (CEDAW/C/USR/3 and 4)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mrs. Bezlepkina (Russian Federation) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Mrs. BEZLEPKINA (Russian Federation) said that during the period of reorientation resulting from Russia's adoption of democratic values and ideals the country's internal resources were strained and its people were struggling with a falling standard of living. The transition to a market economy was being hampered by social and psychological inertia. Production in the manufacturing sector had dropped to an all-time low, and most people had suffered a sharp reduction in income. The gap between the highest and lowest income levels was 15 times greater than before. People often commented that the reforms had benefited the world community more than they had the people of Russia. Moreover, ethnic conflicts had resulted in an acute problem of migration within Russian territory. Social infrastructure in rural areas was also being drastically reduced.

3. To be properly understood, the status of women in Russia must be seen within the context of those problems. Women in Russia had always enjoyed full political, economic and social rights, and the Russian Constitution specified and confirmed their legal rights. To put those constitutional principles into effect, a vast national mechanism had been established, which had made it possible to predict and, to some degree, alleviate the negative consequences on women of the economic crisis, to include gender factors in State social policy and to take specific measures aimed at facilitating women's adaptation to the market economy.

4. As far as the participation of women in decision-making was concerned, their political activity was on the rise. In October 1993, the political movement "Women of Russia", whose objective was to bring women into government decision-making bodies, won 21 seats out of 225 in the Parliament. Women's organizations were fully integrated into the social and political structure and covered a broad range of activities. At the same time, because of their lack of organizational and political experience, women's organizations had yet to have a major impact on the political process.

5. The recent social changes in Russia had given rise to some tension and increasing differentiation between the roles of men and women. Some of the new political parties were calling for a return of women to their traditional roles in the home. Women still had very little real access to political and economic power. The former socialist model for the advancement of women had been rejected, but a viable new system had yet to be devised.

6. The issues of poverty and unemployment were entirely new for Russia. Approximately 47 per cent of children under 15 were currently living in single parent families below the poverty line. People were less motivated to work hard and to seek training and education, and there had been an increase in social dependence. The feminization of poverty was closely related to unemployment among women: women made up 70 per cent of the unemployed, and they tended to be unemployed twice as long as men. The strategy for the first stage of economic transformation provided only limited social protection measures for the most vulnerable groups in society. The Government's main priority was to provide an adequate level of social protection for those groups.

7. Turning to the questions compiled by the Pre-session Working Group, she said that the Russian Federation had a national mechanism for drafting and implementing State policy on women at the federal, regional and local level, and a National Council for the Fourth World Conference on Women had been established in 1993. Programmes had been designed to promote de facto equality of men and women, to support women candidates in the recent elections and to help women gain true equality within the family. The Government provided special support to mothers in order to address the declining birth rate, and other State programmes sought to reconcile a woman's work with her home responsibilities. Although all discrimination against women had been removed from government instruments, women's participation remained inadequate as yet. In December 1994, a national conference on women in development had been held to discuss various strategies.

8. With regard to the forced resettlement of returning ethnic Russians, she said that 53.4 per cent of returnees were women. A resettlement office had been established to implement the Government's long-term migration programme and to help returnees find work and housing. Those considered refugees received special allowances and interest-free long-term housing loans.

9. With regard to the legislative measures, she said that discrimination on the grounds of sex was prohibited in the Constitution, the Marriage and Family Code, the Penal Code and the new Civil Code, and a law on domestic violence was currently being prepared. To ensure equal opportunity, employment, population and family support programmes had been implemented at all levels. The federal employment programme was intended to broaden opportunities for women and open up alternative forms of employment reflecting concerns for occupational safety and protection for maternity. A Presidential Decree issued in 1993 had set the priorities for the State policy on women.

10. In response to the Committee's request for more up-to-date information about women in positions of leadership, she said that women were playing an increasingly prominent role in social movements and political parties. The establishment of the "Women of Russia" movement in October 1993 had boosted women's social and political activity and encouraged them to run for political office. Women currently accounted for 11.4 per cent of the deputies in the Russian Federation Federal Assembly (5.6 per cent in the Federation Council and 13.6 per cent in the State Duma), which represented a distinct improvement on the 1990 figures. Moreover, only two of the seven parties represented in the Federal Assembly had no female deputies.

11. The number of women in senior positions in federal ministries and departments was still too low. There were just two female federal ministers, only one of whom was a member of the Government. The acting Chairman of the Central Bank of Russia was a woman, and there were 10 female deputy leaders of federal executive organs. In no sector of the economy, did women occupy more than 20 per cent of senior positions, although 54 per cent of all school principals, 23 per cent of cooperative owners, 17-19 per cent of entrepreneurs and 39 per cent of the co-owners of limited liability partnerships were women.

12. A number of associations for female entrepreneurs were springing up in Russia, for example the Confederation of Russian Businesswomen and the Association of Female Entrepreneurs. Such associations aimed to provide consultative, educational and practical assistance to women starting out in business.

13. Russia was trying to take into account the recommendations of the international community. The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation "On Priority Tasks of State Policy With Respect to Women" noted the need to create conditions for the real participation of women in the activity of State organs and social organizations. Commissions and committees on issues relating to women, families and children had been established at various levels of government and their work was being coordinated on the basis of a unified conceptual approach reflected in a national platform of action to improve the status of women. The strategy for integrating women into management at the decision-making level was geared primarily to formulating special programmes for training and promoting capable and competent women.

14. Regarding measures that were being taken to correct stereotypes, such issues were addressed in various ways in the mass media with government support. Considerable efforts were being made to inculcate moral and family values and to promote a respectful attitude towards individuals in general and women in particular. The Government-funded "Hope" radio station, which specialized in highlighting problems encountered by women, was performing particularly useful work. Its broadcasts were designed to overcome stereotypes about women and inform them of their rights and the opportunities for exercising those rights while simultaneously explaining government policy on women. Unfortunately, some other sections of the mass media were perpetuating traditional, patriarchal propaganda concerning relations between the sexes.

15. According to data from the office of the Russian Federation Procurator-General, there had been 331,800 crimes committed against women in 1993; 14,500 women had died as a result and 56,400 had suffered bodily injury. A total of 14,400 rapes had been recorded in 1993; of that total 1,800 involved abuse of minors. The high incidence of violence against women and children was attributed, in part, to the difficult social and economic situation and increased unemployment.

16. A Declaration on the Eradication of Violence Against Women had been discussed at a special session of the National Preparatory Council for the Fourth World Conference on Women held in September 1994. The first step towards such eradication was the elaboration of the national platform of action to

improve the status of women, a major part of which was devoted to prevention of such violence.

17. Under current legislation, rape was regarded as an extremely serious crime punishable by a lengthy prison term. In addition, there were a number of statutes which made specific provision for the protection of women, for example chapter 19 of the Criminal Code on crimes against sexual inviolability and article 146 on violations of citizens' equal rights. On a practical level, the militia had taken steps to identify dysfunctional families and deal with crime at the source. It had been recommended that shelters be set up for victims of domestic violence.

18. A network of institutions offering psychological support and medical consultation had been established for victims of domestic violence. The Government had taken steps to develop and extend the network of special rehabilitation centres for single women, mothers with children, battered women and women experiencing particular difficulties of any kind. There were currently over 200 such centres run by a variety of organizations, governmental and other. There were no data on the number of Russian women who had died violently expressed as a proportion of the total number of violent deaths.

19. No cases of persecution of women for religious reasons had officially been recorded in the Russian Federation, and Russia could not be held responsible for the situation in other republics of the former Soviet Union.

20. As to whether the collapse of the social security system had placed additional burdens on women in the home, she said that the division of responsibilities within the home was a matter for collective decision by the family; the Government's aim was to create conditions for promoting equality between men and women in the domestic environment and to ensure that the younger generation was exposed to propaganda emphasizing equality in the sharing of domestic tasks. Economic deregulation enabled women to contribute directly to family income by getting involved in business activities. A number of special educational programmes had been formulated to encourage women to get more involved in public life.

21. On the topic of prostitution, she said that there were no official data on the subject, although some studies were being carried out. No special programmes were in place to ensure that prostitutes had access to regular health checks, nor were there any rehabilitation programmes since prostitution was not a criminal offence. Regarding reports that many Russian women had contracted marriages with foreigners simply to leave the country, she said that the choice of a marriage partner was a matter solely for the women concerned. It was certainly possible that the economic situation might have forced some women into prostitution. Now that Russia had joined Interpol it was easier to monitor organizations which often served as a cover to lure Russian women abroad for the sex industry.

22. Concerning women's participation in public and political life, she said that the Government was reluctant to return to the outmoded quota systems of the Soviet era and wished to create conditions which would enable women's initiative to develop naturally. Since 1990 some 300 different women's organizations had

sprung up in Russia. One major area of activity pursued by a number of women's non-governmental organizations was the protection of women's rights in cases of mass redundancies and unemployment. Such organizations fostered women's entrepreneurial initiative, for example in the sphere of private farming, and taught them about working from home, retraining opportunities, and getting involved in charity work.

23. Regarding government measures to eliminate sexism in educational establishments, she said that in a country such as Russia, where women were integrated into practically all spheres of life, the problem of sexism in education could hardly be described as a live issue. Moreover, public consciousness had long been educated to think of women as the equals and partners of men.

24. The imbalance between women and men in vocational training could be explained by the restrictions that had been placed on women's access to certain industries, trades and work involving difficult and unhealthy conditions. Despite those prohibitions, the proportion of women studying in higher educational establishments and secondary specialized institutions stood at 51 per cent and 59 per cent respectively, which corresponded to the proportion of women in the population as a whole. Regarding changes in the educational system resulting from the economic upheaval, she reported that over 580 high schools, 340 lycees and 300 non-State schools were operating in Russia in 1993.

25. The preponderance of women among the unemployed could largely be explained by the greater reduction of jobs in sectors of the economy traditionally dominated by women. The initial phase of the establishment of a labour market in Russia had already been completed, and the measures taken by the Russian Government in that sphere had resulted in an evening out of the numbers of men and women being made redundant. The proportion of women officially registered as unemployed in 1995 was not expected to exceed 55-60 per cent, which corresponded to the structure of employment as a whole.

26. Compliance with State labour guarantees in the private sector was a pressing issue. The concept of the interrelationship between the State and the individual in the sphere of labour relations at a time of economic transition was still in the process of being formulated. It was geared to State assistance in providing citizens with employment and hence an adequate standard of living.

27. There had never been any official State policy declaring that women's place was in the home. Freedom of the press guaranteed open discussion of the role of women in society. She pointed out that if a woman, particularly a pregnant woman, was refused employment, she could seek remedy in the courts, and that a company could not cite financial difficulties as justification for its conduct.

28. Referring to questions concerning measures to reduce discrimination in the workplace, and policies to enable mothers to work part-time, she said that as indicated in the report (para. 178), work in the area of health, education and culture, was undervalued. Women earned less than men, primarily because they were employed in those low-paying branches. Measures were being taken to narrow the wage gap between women and men. However, women engaged in the same activity as men did receive equal pay. Official data gave no indication of wage

discrimination between the sexes. Pregnant women working in industry were entitled to work 70 days outside the home and 30 days at home.

29. Responding to another question, she said that measures to assist needy women had been fully implemented. The introduction of economic reform had brought an increase in family allowances. Factors such as inflation, price liberalization and regional differences in the cost of living made it difficult to determine the value of those allowances in real terms. The method of granting allowances had also been overhauled; every effort was being made to provide assistance on the basis of individual need.

30. In 1990, there had been three types of allowances, including a monthly child-care allowance of 35 roubles at the time of birth, which covered 57 per cent of the child's basic needs and monthly allowances covering 40 per cent of children's needs for children of single mothers, servicemen and divorced parents, or for children who were wards of the State. Allowances were also provided for children educated in the home, provided that the parents were qualified to assume that responsibility.

31. Within the limits of existing resources, every effort was being made to adjust children's allowances to inflation and fluctuating food prices. The context of economic reform and the fact that the Russian Federation had little experience in that area made the process painful. Existing allowances had been periodically increased and a number of new allowances were now granted to families with children. By the end of 1993, the Russian Federation provided 10 different types of allowances, covering 30 per cent of pre-school children's needs and 12 per cent of the needs of school-age children. Special allowances were provided to families with disabled children and to foster parents. In 1993, the relationship between the educational system and the family was modified and many existing allowances were consolidated. Annual child-care leave was also guaranteed.

32. Parents on maternity leave were given 100 per cent of the minimum wage until the child reached the age of 18 months. That was covered by social security. Monthly allowances were also granted for children under age 6 and for school-age children. Single-parent families received an allowance that was 1.5 times larger and food subsidies for the children. During their three-year child-care leave, women continued to receive a monthly allowance, which was now equal to 50 per cent of the minimum wage. Allowances were paid by employers and could be obtained for longer periods of time; the amount depended on the cost of living in each region.

33. In real terms, as of November 1994, family allowances represented 22.5 per cent of the minimum wage. In single-parent families, it covered 40.9 per cent of the basic needs of pre-school children and slightly less in the case of school-age children. Allowances had been maintained in most regions during the transitional period of economic reform. Furthermore, a law to strengthen the system of allowances and benefits had just been adopted.

34. Reform and restructuring had not only pushed up the cost of medical services but had also affected their quality. Women had been severely affected and the infant mortality rate had risen. Concerning questions on the medical

care provided for older women, she said that article 17 of the Basic Legislation of the Russian Federation guaranteed the protection of all citizen's health, regardless of age, sex or nationality. Articles 22 through 26 provided for the protection of pregnant women, mothers, minors and the elderly.

35. As part of the shift to a market economy, State-guaranteed health insurance had been established and a law ensuring health insurance for all citizens had been adopted. The law also provided for health services for pregnant women through the post-natal period, the monitoring of girls up to the age of 18 and the distribution of contraceptives. Free medical assistance was provided to pregnant and nursing women. Free medicine was provided to children 3 years of age and under, to children in large families up to the age of 6, and to disabled children up to the age of 16. In cases of serious illness, free or discounted medicine was available to women and the elderly. As there had been some snags in the application of the law guaranteeing assistance to women and children, the Ministry of Health and the Parliament were drafting more effective legislation.

36. Replying to questions on the threat of AIDS and measures taken to prevent its spread, including public information campaigns, she said that the control of AIDS was a national priority; in fact it was even regarded as a matter of national security. As of 1 January 1994, 264 women were infected with the HIV virus, 111 or 42 per cent of whom were girls. In 33 of those women, the virus had been detected during pregnancy. The Government had formulated a federal programme for AIDS control for the period 1993-1995, which included preventive measures, such as providing information to persons of various ages and social backgrounds. Religious and social organizations and members of high-risk groups were participating in the programme. A network of 79 territorial centres under one single office provided psychological counselling and support. The Russian Federation had also set up a national system for diagnosing and monitoring the spread of the HIV virus and the Government had drafted a law on the prevention of AIDS.

37. Replying to questions concerning inadequacies in family planning services and their effect on the incidence of abortion, she said that the Government had formulated a federal family planning programme which operated at the national, regional and local levels. In 1994, more than 25 family planning centres were operating. Family planning offices had also been incorporated into all medical clinics, which ensured that contraceptives were available to the entire Russian population. An information campaign, aimed primarily at adolescents, was also being conducted through the mass media. The goal was to reduce maternal/infant morbidity and mortality and to reduce the rate of abortion by 25 to 30 per cent. In addition, a non-governmental organization for the promotion of family planning had been established. As a result of all those initiatives, abortions among women between the ages of 15 and 49 had dropped from 114 per thousand in 1990 to 94 per thousand in 1994.

38. Replying to another question, she said that regional medical programmes of the former Soviet Republics had not been integrated into the health system of the Russian Federation. Free medical assistance was provided to families with young, disabled or foster children. They were also given special assistance for holiday travel.

39. Regarding the exposure of pregnant women and children to chemical fertilizers, she said that the Government was taking measures to improve the socio-economic situation of rural women. Women employed in agriculture were entitled to additional benefits. In addition, women under the age of 35 years were barred from holding certain agricultural jobs, included on a list prepared by the Government where they risked being exposed to pesticides or disinfectants. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food had developed a technical service for the mechanization of agricultural operations in order to ensure that workers were not exposed to hazardous chemicals. The programme sought to ensure safe working conditions and to reduce the incidence of work-related accidents and disease among women.

40. The market infrastructure was just being established in the rural areas; it would be accessible to all persons. Replying to a question concerning the migration of women, including girls, from rural to urban areas, she said that urban migration was not really a new phenomenon. Women and girls migrated to cities primarily in search of better, more prestigious jobs, which they were not likely to find. Gender-disaggregated unemployment figures were essentially the same in urban and rural areas. The Government provided comprehensive assistance to the agro-industrial complex; it planned to restructure the sector by promoting diversity in agriculture, private land ownership and other market reforms.

41. Replying to a question concerning media reports about homeless children, she said that every year, the Ministry of Internal Affairs arrested approximately 60,000 unsupervised children and more than 300,000 for disorderly conduct or vagrancy. The Government had established centres for their rehabilitation and had also enacted a law prohibiting parents from selling privatized apartments until the authorities had ensured that the children would have a place to live. Efforts were also being made to place orphans in foster homes.

42. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the representative of the Russian Federation for her very comprehensive responses. Speaking in her personal capacity, she asked what impact the increase in the number of private schools would have on the poor. She also wondered how women's participation in decision-making and political life would be ensured without establishing specific quotas.

43. Lastly, noting the difficulties inherent in the transition from the collective system to one which encouraged individual choice, she said the formation of women's organizations could be useful in achieving the full realization of women's rights.

44. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING urged the Russian authorities to continue their efforts, through training, consciousness-raising, and employment opportunities, to overcome the segregation of the labour market which had existed even under the old economic system. In such times of economic difficulties and restructuring, it was natural for women to cling to the family for support; however, that was likely to lead to a perpetuation of deeply ingrained sexual stereotyping. In developing its social policies the Government should bear in mind the rights and needs of women as individuals, not only their family role.

45. She expressed deep concern at the conflict currently taking place within the Russian Federation, not only because of the sufferings it was causing, but also because of the economic resources which were being diverted away from social programmes. She would welcome additional information on the subject, and urged the Russian Federation to seek a peaceful solution since war was never in the interest of the people, especially the women and children.

46. Ms. ABAKA said that it was essential to take affirmative measures to counteract the short-term negative effects that the structural adjustment was having on women, the elderly and children. She expressed grave concern at the major health problems among young people described in paragraphs 232-233 of the latest report, and inquired about the causes of those illnesses and the measures being taken to alleviate them, as well as the anticipated effects on the future employment capacity of the population.

47. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS expressed the hope that the Government would be able to arrest any further deterioration in women's economic, political and social position. She urged the Government to continue its efforts to assert women's rights and to alleviate their economic situation..

48. Ms. MÄKINEN said that, on reading the latest report, she had been struck by the considerable severity of the crisis in the Russian Federation. She was nevertheless convinced that well-educated women in that country had the capability and power to influence events. She urged the Government to implement more special temporary measures to alleviate the situation of women.

49. Ms. BARE, drawing attention to the problems related to unemployment benefits described in paragraphs 188-191 of the fourth report, wondered what measures were being planned to assist women experiencing difficulties in finding work, and to what extent those measures conformed to the principle of equal pay for equal work. She also inquired whether there were any measures to enable women to compete with men in the labour market, especially with reference to health and safety matters.

50. Ms. AYKOR expressed concern at the numbers of highly educated women who were unemployed, and also at the fact that such women, some of whom were infected with the HIV virus, were frequently found to be engaging in prostitution in certain countries bordering on the Russian Federation, motivated by severe economic need. That situation was a violation of the women's human rights.

51. Ms. BUSTELO GARCIA DEL REAL recommended that, given the serious difficulties that women were experiencing, the Government should set up a programme to collect information on the situation of women, so as the better to coordinate its efforts, and propose policies for equal opportunities.

52. Ms. BEZLEPKINA (Russian Federation) said that the new private schools were intended to be alternative forms of education, and that the State system of free education would remain.

53. Regarding quotas for the employment of women in management posts, she said that Russian women were not in favour of quotas because they considered them

demeaning. However, the development of women's organizations in the social field was encouraged, and it was hoped that in such areas, more women would attain positions at high levels of administration.

54. With reference to the question of unemployment benefits, she said that men and women received exactly the same benefits, in addition to which there were many special funds and support programmes which included training schemes.

55. Regarding the worsening health situation, it was true that certain problems were being experienced, and that tuberculosis was on the increase. That was due in part, to ecological and nutritional factors, and the Government did have special programmes designed to deal with such difficulties.

56. She pointed out that she could not comment on the third report, since it had been submitted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; she had therefore confined her remarks to the fourth report. She assured the Committee that those questions which she had been unable to answer would be taken into account in the preparation of the next report.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.